

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BELIZE 00157 111759Z

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FM AMCONSUL BELIZE

TO AMEMBASSY PANAMA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BELIZE 0157

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EINV PINR PN BH

SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR INFORMATION - INDUSTRIAL GROUP OF AZUERO

1. CONGEN REQUESTS INFORMATION ON PANAMANIAN SELF-DESCRIBED INVESTMENT ORGANIZATION CALLING ITSELF "INDUSTRIAL GROUP OF AZUERO", WHICH RECENTLY HAS ATTRACTED ATTENTION HERE BY NEGOTIATING WITH GOG FGR ESTABLISHMENT OF A NUMBER OF BUSINESS ENTERPRISES IN BELIZE. GROUP IS HEADED BY ONE AUGUSTO (OR AUGUSTUS) M. GARCIA.

2. ACCORDING LOCAL PRESS ACCOUNT, GARCIA AND ASSOCIATES HAVE REGISTERED COMPANY HERE NAMED BELIZE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT, LTD., WHICH REPORTEDLY HAS OBTAINED FROM GOB EXCLUSIVE RIGHTS TO ESTABLISH AND OPERATE FOR UNDISCLOSED PERIOD A DUTY FREE ZONE IN CONJUNCTION WITH NEWLY CREATED BELIZE PORT AUTHORITY. AUGUSTO GARCIA IS LISTED AS PRESIDENT OF BELIZE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT, AS WELL AS THREE OTHER COMPANIES REGISTERED THROUGH LOCAL ATTORNEY UINCE LATE 1976.

3. CONOFF WAS PRESENT AT JANUARY 14 RECEPTION AT PANAMANIAN CONSULATE WHEN PREMIER PRICE INTRODUCED GARCIA AND ASSOCIATES WITH GLOWING RECOMMENDATION. INVESTMENT PLANS DESCRIBED BY GARCIA AT THAT TIME
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INCLUDED TILE AND BRICK FACTORY, LIGHT METAL AND AGRICULTURAL MACHINERY CONSTRUCTION, AND CONSTRUCTION OF HOUSING. PACKAGE PRESENTED IN MOST ATTRACTIVE FASHION, BUT NOTHING THEN SAID ABOUT FREE PORT, ALTHOUGH GARCIA SPOKE VAGUELY OF HELPING BUILD NEW PORT FOR BELIZE CITY AND OF ARRANGING LOWER SURFACE CARGO RATES FROM NEW ORLEANS TO BELIZE.

4. NEWSPAPER ACCOUNT INDICATES INDUSTRIAL GROUP OF AZUERO OPERATES "PANAMA FREE ZONE" AT PORT ON PACIFIC COAST OF PANAMA. MEMBERS OF GROUP DESCRIBED THEIR ORGANIZATION TO CONOFF AS ORIGINALLY A BOOTSTRAP OPERATION FORMED FOR COOPERATIVE EFFORT TO DEVELOP AZUERO PENINSULA, PRINCIPALLY IN SUGAR GROWING AND REFINING AREAS AND PORT FACILITY WHICH GROUP CLAIMS TO HAVE CONSTRUCTED. GROUP OBVIOUSLY ENJOYS CONFIDENCE OF PREMIER PRICE AND -- JUDGING FROM PHOTOGRAPHS PASSED AROUND DURING RECEPTION -- AT LEAST SOME DEGREE OF FAVOR FROM GENERAL TORRIJOS. GROUP TRAVELED TO BELIZE, INCIDENTALLY, IN TORRIJOS' PERSONAL AIRCRAFT, ACCOMPANIED BY THE GENERAL'S SON.

5. ALTHOUGH GARCIA'S PROPOSALS WOULD SEEM OF BENEFIT TO BELIZE, THERE IS SKEPTICISM ON PART OF LOCAL BUSINESSMAN OVER MOTIVES OF PECEMANIANS AND REALITY OF INVESTMENT PLANS. GARCIA HAS ATTEMPTED TO PORTRAY HIS GROUP AS

PLAIN BUINESSMEN LOOKING FOR AN HONEST BUCK, BUT WHO HOPE TO ASSIST IN BELIZE'S ECONOMIC GROWTH IN PROCESS. HOWEVER, HE COMES ACROSS AS FIRST RATE CONMAN AND WE HAVE HEARD WORD "MAFIOSO" USED TO DESCRIBE HIM.
GAWF

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